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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the evolution of the boundary-spanning role of the school superintendent and its impact on their ability to function effectively as educational leaders. This role, which is a relatively new development in the definition of superintendency, includes acting as a filtering agent controlling the flow of information in and out of the open and permeable boundary between the school system, the board of education, and the community. The various activities associated with boundary-spanning are also significant sources of stress. Literature on the superintendency reveals boundary-spanning to be a major challenge to the position. To study the impact of boundary-spanning on the role of superintendent, 149 Connecticut superintendents were surveyed via a mailed questionnaire, of which 109 produced usable returns. Data were analyzed qualitatively to determine types of major stressors and frequencies of incidence of each type. Sources of stress include politics, gaining support for budget, public criticism and expectations, the challenge of student achievement, negative press coverage, and the personal and professional toll generated by a heavy workload. The primary recommendation, which holds policy implications, is the need to reexamine the position of school superintendent, paying particular attention to the boundary-spanning role. (Contains 29 references.) (RT)

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Boundary Spanning in School Leadership: Implications for Achieving Excellence

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Abstract

Today, the position of school superintendent is among the most challenging positions of leadership. At the same time that they are being asked to meet higher standards in student achievement, schools leaders are required to engage in collaborative leadership in a jurisdiction that extends into the community. This paper examines the evolution of the boundary spanning inherent in school leadership, reports on a recent study of said role, discusses implications for achieving excellence in student achievement, and presents recommendations and policy implications.

Introduction

This paper examines the evolution of the boundary-spanning role of the school superintendent and it's impact on their ability to function effectively as educational leaders. Questions are raised regarding the impact on achieving academic excellence, and policy implications are considered in light of the results of a recent study on stress in the superintendency.

The Superintendency

Historical Background

The position of superintendent of schools has existed in American public education since the mid 1800s when many school districts in larger cities appointed an individual to be responsible for the day-to-day operations of several school houses (Glass, 1992). Established in 1837 in Buffalo, New York and Louisville, Kentucky the superintendency was established to carry out policy directives of the school board. By 1890, school reform leaders sought to establish the superintendent as a professional expert who would deal with the administration of schools. Thus, the superintendent was viewed as both a professional expert, that is, an educator knowledgeable of pedagogy, and capable of directing educational programs as well a capable of being a leader in public education reform. The superintendent as expert and the superintendent as administrator resulted in different perceptions of what the roles and responsibilities should entail (Callahan, 1966). Moreover, superintendents have assumed both roles at different times. Consequently, an unclear dichotomy between the roles and

responsibilities of the superintendency was created (Seder, 1991). This lack of clarity of the roles and responsibilities is well documented in the literature.

Historically, the relationship between superintendents and school boards has been the subject of much discussion. From the original role of schoolmaster, with the board responsible for making all-important decisions, the position evolved to where superintendents became managing administrators with operational authority separate from the school board. Johnson (1995) noted that the demands on public education have changed greatly over the course of this century. Changes in the superintendency and its relationship with board members emerge as two of the salient issues creating stress in the position.

Changes in the Superintendency

Today, the position of school superintendent is among the most challenging positions of leadership. Lilly (1992-1993) offered that school district leadership could be conceived as a phenomenon, which is a shared and social process. Wallace (1996) observed that the superintendent is expected to be a visionary leader who organizes the human and financial resources of a school district to achieve excellence in the performance of students, professionals and support personnel with the help of community support. Eastman & Mirochnik (1991) described the responsibilities and problems inherent in the position of the superintendent as wide in scope and variety. "Superintendents are seen handling a variety of situations from attending community events, talking to the media, meeting with parents, supervising building construction and renovation, negotiating with teacher unions, and meeting with school boards" (p. 1).

In The Study of the American Superintendency '92 (Glass, 1992) noted that the role of the contemporary superintendent had changed due to social changes and tensions in the 1960s and 1970s, reform in the 1980s and 1990s, and the growth in state and federal mandates. In the 1980s increased state and federal mandates dominated school reform, resulting in more bureaucracy, though few changes occurred because funding did not always follow the mandates. In the 1990s, the choice movement and advocacy for more control at the local level by principals, parents, teachers, and students have brought additional challenges to the superintendents' authority and policymaking leadership. These current reform efforts call for superintendents to engage in collaborative leadership (Glass, 1992). The study showed that the complexity of the position has increased, superintendents agreed that increased training is necessary to lead school districts, and increased pressure is experienced from special interest groups. The most serious challenges superintendents reported were finance, student assessment/testing, general district accountability, changing demographics; and developing new programs.

Regarding the contemporary role of the superintendent, the study found that the jurisdiction of the superintendent is not solely situated in the district office or in the schools, but extends into the community. The study suggested that this increased visibility may pose the most serious challenge in the 1990s as many citizens are demanding increased accountability for learning and use of their tax dollars. (Superintendents' responses indicated that many aspects of the profession must change if schools are to meet the challenges of the 21st century.) The most recent study of American superintendents (Glass, Bjork & Brunner, 2001) had similar findings.

Johnson (1995) found that superintendents she studied exercised three kinds of leadership: educational leadership in which superintendents used their knowledge and experience to diagnose local educational needs, discern problems of educational improvement, and recommend strategies for improving teaching and learning; political leadership where superintendents interacted with city officials, school board members, and union leaders in an effort to secure the funds, decision-making authority, and public regard needed to improve their schools; and managerial leadership in which superintendents used the structures of their district organizations to connect school leaders and influence the schools' practices. Johnson concluded that effective superintendents were adept at combining these three approaches to leadership.

Additionally, part of the present-day context of the superintendency is the notion of the superintendent as key to implementing various school change efforts (Eastman & Mirochnik, 1991), and the role of the superintendent as instructional leader, which has recently been raised. Bjork (1993) observed that during the past decade the pressure for educational reform has increased and superintendents have been faced with the need to act decisively to improve schools. The instructional leadership role of superintendents involves focusing district resources, creating the conditions, and providing public advocacy has been the essential framework in which curriculum and instruction and learning occur may be subject to change (Bjork, 1993). Because of this growing importance of instructional leadership to the superintendency, Bjork emphasized that a better understanding of the contextual constraints of the superintendents' work is critical if they are expected to act as instructional leaders. The 1992 study of superintendents also reported greater emphasis on instruction than in previous decades.

Superintendents continue to face an increasingly difficult task. Carter and Cunningham (1997) described it as "the balancing act that most superintendents and boards find themselves called on to perform as they struggle to improve student learning." The challenge for the superintendent in the 1990s, according to Carter and Cunningham, is to find ways to manage the various national, state, and local pressures in working with board and staff members to develop the most effective schools.

The Task Force on School District Leadership (2001) traced the changing priorities from the four B's: Bonds, Budgets, Buses and Buildings during the first half of the 20th century to the four R's: Race, Resources, Relationships and Rules in the 1970s; to the current array of concerns described as the four A's": Academic standards, Accountability, Autonomy and Ambiguity and "the five C's": Collaboration, Communication, Connection, Child advocacy and Community building.

The "five C's" reflect the essential role schools play in the life of the local community and as advocates for children whose social, behavioral, and academic patterns virtually dictate new kinds of links between schools and community resource providers, businesses, and other organizations that can provide resources and expertise. Now more than ever before, districts must maintain constant contact with a bewildering array of internal and external stakeholders to share information and request feedback on a range of issues (p. 2.).

While Kerr (2001) argues that organizations of the future will increasingly face problems of differentiation and that boundaryless organizations can help to organize the diversity by moving money, people and information across internal and external boundaries, schools have been experiencing boundarylessness for some time now and are

becoming increasingly more so. And, largely due to their fiscally dependent role, do not have the luxury, as private organizations do, of moving money, people and information across boundaries. Rather they are engaged in negotiating and competing for funds, building coalitions, resolving conflicts, and otherwise rising to the expectations of a skeptical public. It could be argued that the present array of challenges posed by the five C's clearly illustrate the disappearance of boundaries, and the increased stressors inherent in this role.

Boundary Spanning Role

Boundary spanners serve as the vital link between the organization and the environment as they filter environmental perceptions and interpretations. By controlling the flow of information in and out of the organization, a boundary spanner assumes the role of "gatekeeper" Goldring (1995). However, Rallis and Criscoe (1993) contended that because the positions are political by nature, board members "cannot be gatekeepers, they must receive everything and find a spot for it or modify it" (p.9). Since according to Goldring, boundary spanning is often defined by the organizational structure, it is conceivable that because school systems are open systems and the boundaries are permeable (Bacharach & Mundell, 1995), superintendents are likely to experience conflict in their boundary spanning role not only with board members but with central office and building administrators as well.

Inherent in and compounding the boundary-spanning role of the superintendent is conflict-mediation. The 1992 Study of the American Superintendency found that the increase in pressure from special interest groups in the community was of particular concern to superintendents who reported that they and their boards were under greater

pressure from such groups than ever before. But community groups are not the only groups exerting pressures on the superintendent. As noted in the 1992 study, the superintendent must serve many masters including parents, board, state office, community and employee groups. This boundary-spanning role casts the superintendent in a position to mediate conflict not only among the various community groups but also among members or factions within groups. Moreover, superintendents are also involved with various people other than board members. Brimm's (1981) study of sources of administrative stress found that trying to resolve parent-school conflicts was ranked fourth by superintendents. The researcher concluded that this ranking suggest that many superintendents are continually pressured by parents to resolve school-related conflicts. In Koch et al. (1982) study of administrators including superintendents, superintendents reported that trying to resolve differences between and among students, parent/school conflicts, and handling student discipline problems as contributing to conflict-mediating stress. Their boundary-spanning role puts superintendents in a position to face and mediate increasing amounts of conflicts.

The Task Force on School District Leadership (2001) concluded that because of "the increasingly political nature of education and its very visible profile as a national issue, district leaders must recognize more clearly than ever before that their spotlighted role is occurring at a time when an explosion of information and popular debate is happening. Too many district leaders assume their posts embarrassingly uninformed about how to deal with this salient aspect of their job. Effective communication among board members, superintendents, district and school staff, as well as parents, students, and community members is not only essential, it can make the vital difference between

success and failure. District leaders must be comfortable with managing media relations, public meetings and politically-inspired pressures, and they must be adept at developing both permanent and temporary coalitions with often disparate community groups.... It is not enough for school leaders to claim an awareness of these widely underrated facets of school leadership; good leaders are those who work ceaselessly to improve their skills as public personalities" (p. 8).

Boundary-Spanning Stress

Boundary-spanning stress is defined as stress arising from the administrator's activities in relating the school to the external environment such as collective bargaining, dealing with regulator agencies, and gaining public support for school budgets (Koch et al., 1982).

In examining the boundary spanning and interdependent nature of the superintendency, Johnson (1995) asserted that school districts are not freestanding, self-sufficient organizations because the interests and practices of public education are entwined with those of government, business, community groups, and social agencies. This interdependence, Johnson continued, brings both obligation and opportunity. "Superintendents must now pay attention to the fiscal worries of mayors and the political interests of governors; however, they can also now build partnerships with social service agencies to support children and families. While interdependence surely limits the utility of top-down authority, making it virtually impossible for superintendents to lead in conventional ways, it also expands the chance for collaboration and shared leadership between educators and their communities" (p. 274).

School districts are considered to be open systems. According to Bacharach and Mundell (1995) in open-systems, the organizational boundaries are permeable and function as filters screening inputs and outputs since organizations cannot deal with all elements from the environment. Wiener (1975) posited that the concept of permeability assumes that any social system, such as a school, is surrounded by a psychological boundary that insulates it from its environment. The degree to which this boundary is permeable to input from outside the system is directly proportional to the openness of the system. Boundaries also serve as mechanisms to secure a certain amount of organizational independence from the environment. For school leaders today, these boundaries are virtually nonexistent. This means they have to find new ways to deal with the lack of insulation from the environment

While the main function of boundary spanners is to manage the permeability of the boundaries (Goldring, 1995), the functions of a leader in a boundaryless organization are yet to be defined. On observing the increasing challenges to the superintendency, almost a decade ago, (Glass, 1992), noted it would be important to examine the boundary spanning activities and the level of stress inherent in this role. Richardson's (1999) study of stress in the Connecticut superintendency found a moderate amount of stress.

In large measure ambiguity, complexity, and uncertainty in the environment compound the stress in the boundary spanning role. Milliken (1987) posited three types of perceived environmental uncertainty that have a bearing on boundary spanners' functioning; State uncertainty or the inability to understand how elements in the environment are changing; effect uncertainty refers to the inability to know how environmental change will impact the organization; and response uncertainty which is

experienced by administrators when they perceive the need to react or decide among strategies in response to environmental threats, changes or impacts.

Lilly (1992), posited that much of the strategic leadership tasks of the superintendent involves making decisions regarding the strategic position of the school district relative to its environment (p. 21). Organizational leaders use various strategies to respond to their environments. Goldring (1995) grouped environmental management strategies in to three categories: strategies aimed at reducing the dependencies between organizations and their environment, strategies aimed at environmental adaptation to promote organizational-environment relations, and strategies aimed at changing the environment to maintain the organization. Goldring stated that boundary spanners use adaptive strategies in attempts to increase cooperation and joint action between the organization and the environment. Wills and Peterson (1992) found that superintendents' perceptions of environmental uncertainty shape their strategies for implementing reform legislation. Superintendents in unanalyzable environments, that is, working in districts with irregular reports and feedback from the environment as well as limited information "appeared to have managed the uncertainty by synchronizing their own strategic behavior to the unpredictable nature of their environment" (p. 258).

In summary, this synthesis of the literature on the superintendency reveals boundary spanning as a major challenge to the superintendency. What follows comprises the qualitative results on the boundary spanning aspect of a larger study on stress in the superintendency.

Demographics and Methods

The sample for this study consisted of the entire population of superintendents in the state of Connecticut (n=149). Each superintendent was mailed a questionnaire which included an open-ended, write-in item which requested superintendents to identify additional stressors not explicitly listed in the survey (The Administrative Stress Index adapted from Gmelch and Swent ,1982). The item stem read as follows: "Other situations about your job that bothers you." A total of 149 surveys were mailed, one to each superintendent in the state of Connecticut, yielding 109 usable returns for a 73% rate of return. Of the usable returns 41 superintendents completed this item yielding a total of 71 additional stressors.

Additionally, subset of the total sample of superintendents (n=16) were interviewed. Each participant was asked to identify three major stress factors in their job, to describe what the stress factor meant to them, and to explain why the factor causes stress.

Data Analysis

Data from the open-ended, write-in survey item were listed and given to educators (n = 5) to be placed into one of four categories of stress: Role-based, task-based, boundary-spanning and conflict-mediating stress plus an additional category labeled "Other." These ratings were done by college professors (2), school administrators (3). Inter-rater agreement was calculated for each item. The percentage of people who put the item in a specific category was the criterion used to determine the category in which it belonged. If an item did not fit neatly into any single category (i.e. the item did not receive a minimum of 60% inter-rater agreement, or three out of 5) it was placed in the

category labeled "Other." From this analysis,19 items were categorized as boundary-spanning stress with an average rating of 4.52, the highest average rating among the four categories.

Data collected through interviews were analyzed according to qualitative guidelines developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1978) for grounded theory inquiry. The data were coded according to the constant comparative method of analysis, an inductive procedure consisting of comparing each new incident encountered in the data to previously coded incidents.

Two levels of analysis were conducted. For the first level of analysis, each of the major stressors was coded into categories that emerged from the data. For the second level of analysis, each incident or explanation of each major stressor was coded into as many categories as possible. Some categories were constructed as they emerged from the data, and some categories were taken from the literature on the superintendency. As each incident or explanation of a major stressor was being coded for a category, it was compared with previously coded incidents or explanations. Aster several iterations of coding, further comparisons were made between and among categories and each category was examined for its properties. This resulted in a reduction of the original number of categories and the identification of subcategories for each category. All data linked to each category were grouped and labeled. The frequencies of each incident or explanation of the major stressors was recorded and computed to determine the frequency with which each category was mentioned.

An inter-rater reliability was conducted with five additional educators. A total of 46 major stressors were indicated by the 16 superintendents interviewed. One

superintendent indicated only one major stressor citing that she did not experience any other stressors. These 46 stressors were listed and given to educators (n = 5) to place each stressor into one of the four categories of stress: Role-based, task-based, boundary-spanning and conflict-mediating stress plus an additional category labeled "Other." This categorization was completed by college professors (2), school administrators (3). Inter-rater agreement was calculated for each item. The percentage of people who put the item in a specific category was the criterion used to determine the category in which it belongs. If an item did not fit neatly into any single category (i.e. the item did not receive a minimum of 60% inter-rater agreement, or three out of 5) it was placed in the category labeled "Other."

Findings

Stressors identified as boundary spanning comprised the highest number of additional stressors written in by superintendents on the survey. These items included: "Mandates without funding," "Intrusion by other government officials," Unions," and "Trying to maintain a balance between political agendas in my region." Politics was the main source of boundary spanning stress.

The personal interview data also revealed politics as well as public criticism/expectations, both of which are part of boundary spanning, as major stressors. Superintendents also noted the personal and professional toll of stress. Politics as a major source of stress was comprised of three subcategories: Interfacing with politicians, interference of politicians, and gaining support for budget. Public criticism included three subcategories: Public expectations, challenge of student achievement, and negative press coverage. A brief discussion follows.

Politics

In several instances superintendents identified a major stressor as politics, yet in describing the stressor, they described board relations. However, as one superintendent so aptly put it, "The people on the board are also politicians because they're elected officials." In analyzing the results of this study, I used politics to refer to incidents other than board relations, for example, interfacing with town politicians, and interference of town politicians.

Interfacing with Politicians. Interfacing with politicians was the largest subcategory of the stressors generated by politics and referred to issues such as: "I'm very leery about aligning myself in any way with either political party or anybody currently in office because every two years that changes." "I think the difficulty is because you are one of the major figures in town... that you can't help but, in some people's minds, you're being associated with political figures" "We spend a lot of time dealing with the partisan political system of this city." "I am resentful of some of the issues that take so much time that really are more political in nature and in the overall impact of learning the children aren't probably very significant but the overall impact of the politics with that I resent that."

Interference of Politicians. The interference of politicians was the second largest subcategory of stressors generated by politics and related to the involvement of political figures in education. "I would say the overall politics of balancing people from different perceptions and different philosophies about their role in school governance is a major stress factor," stated one superintendent.

Gaining Support for Budget. Gaining support for budget was the third most frequently described subcategory of the stressors generated by politics. This subcategory was explained by statements such as: "The politics of the town council.... People who are not directly involved in schools but control the funds we receive." One superintendent explained, "Well, I think that not so much building the budget and not so much getting board approval because that's the easy part.... We're not out there on a limb asking for the moon, the stars and the sun..... Our board in very pro education, pro child, it's when you get to the council and mayoral level."

Public Criticism/Expectations

Public criticism and public expectations was frequently cited by superintendents as a major source of stress. The category of stressors comprised of public expectations, the challenge of student achievement, and negative press coverage.

Public Expectations. This subcategory included such stressors as: "Having to be all things to all people." "The demand for high quality interactions all the time." "The high visibility...no time to let one's hair down." "The public is very skeptical...their expectations and demands are colored by that skepticism, and so I find that stressful because I don't think there's a real match between the public's perception and the reality of what schools are doing for most students in this country or our students in Connecticut anyway," stated one superintendent. "It goes back to juggling the variety of things because whatever number of things that are on your plate, to some constituency group that should be number one, except each group feels that the 10 that may be on your plate should be number one," complained another.

The Challenge of Student Achievement. The challenge of student achievement was discussed primarily as it relates to raising test scores overall in the district, and the pressures felt from the community when test scores are published. One superintendent, expressing his frustration, remarked, "The perception is that the adults aren't succeeding.....There are always individual successes, but the difficulty is to make that happen for more kids with a diverse population."

Negative Press Coverage. This was a subcategory of the stressors generated by public criticism, and was described as stressful because, "It gives the community a false impression and misinformation about the issues which is difficult to correct," averred one superintendent. Another confided, "I think maybe there's a sort of an anxiety syndrome that sets in after a while. You start looking over your shoulder .... I mean you get a little paranoid and you get hypersensitive and ....you get to the point where you misread situations. You see things that aren't there because you've been in the paper five times in five days or there have been three nasty issues in three days. It can distort your judgment."

Personal/Professional Toll

This was a subcategory of the stressors generated by heavy workload. It included the lack of time to devote to personal life and family and lack of time of professional development. In addition, superintendents referred to the high level of visibility and its impact on their lives. "Superintendents are very public figures and that I find a little stressful. There's not much anonymity to the job. I can't simply go somewhere, at least in this city, and be me. I'm always having to be a school superintendent." "There are times, many times, I can't focus on my private life because I'm so concerned about my work

life. It affects my dreaming, my sleeping. I wake up thinking about issues.... I find myself becoming a boring person.... It's a problem that can escalate if you don't control it and the more work controls my mind, the less focus I put on other parts of my life and then ultimately that's not healthy." "In general the destruction of your personal life is very hard," said another, "and every small interaction has consequences to your leadership."

Conclusions and Policy Implications

As the social, economic, political and technological landscape changes, the nature of schooling and leadership continues to increase in complexity. School leaders operate in a virtually boundaryless environment at the same time they are primarily responsible for raising the academic achievement of students. And, due in large measure to their fiscally dependent role, they do not have the luxury, as private organizations do, of moving money, people, or information across boundaries. Rather they are engaged in negotiating and competing for funds, building coalitions, resolving conflicts, and otherwise trying to fulfill the expectations of a skeptical public.

All these demands on the superintendency increase the impact of the external environment on the management and control of the internal functioning of school districts. Superintendents must pay increased attention to managing their school district's external environments and consequently must define their role as boundary spanners as well as their role as instructional leaders. At its inception in 1800s superintendents were seen as knowledgeable of pedagogy and capable of directing educational programs and leading educational reform. Today, consumed by pressures from diverse sources, that

aspect of their role is becoming obscure. The increasingly complex, ambiguous, and uncertain nature of the environment makes boundary spanning one, if not the major challenge to the contemporary school superintendent.

In the study reported here, politics was ranked among the major sources of stress. In referring to politics, superintendents included not only interference and interactions with local politicians but also political dealings with board members as elected officials. One superintendent declared, "One of the biggest tasks, I believe, for any superintendent of schools is to prepare his or her board of education to make decisions, to furnish them the right to give them wise counsel, to offer them options, as little as possible...If board members knew what they were supposed to do....and there is the superintendent knows what she or he was supposed to do, the politics would probably be lessened considerably."

Connecticut superintendents bemoaned the time taken away from educational and managerial leadership by political leadership activities. Yet as their boundary spanning role expands, it is clear that superintendents will need to improve their capacity for handling their political leadership role, as a major aspect of their task.

Connecticut superintendents complained of the amount of time they were required to devote to political leadership in which they interacted with city officials, school board members, and union leaders in an effort to secure funding. "It's a land mine because whenever you're dealing with politicians, there is that tendency that people will associate you with the political party .... Their first priority really is to be reelected and then to take care of business and the public perception of business," one superintendent bewailed. Some mentioned the interference of local politicians in decision making about education

and usurping the superintendent's decision-making authority. Others noted the political issues around various community groups and public pressure.

"It's getting an equitable budget to be able to run our school system and then staying within the budget," complained one superintendent. "Those are the kinds of things that drive a superintendent crazy! Getting the political entities to approve a budget that you need in order to operate your school system ... If you don't get a good budget you become the focal point because you're the one making the recommendation as to where the cuts will be coming from and they project their anger on you" he maintained. One can almost feel the agony in these remarks.

Regarding the contemporary role of the superintendent, Carter and Cunningham, (1997) found that the jurisdiction of the superintendent is not solely situated in the district office or in the schools, but extends into the community. They further suggest that this increased visibility may pose the most serious challenge in the 1990s as many citizens are demanding increased accountability for learning and use of their tax dollars. Several superintendents in this study raised the issue of high visibility as a source of stress.

One superintendent's remarks are representative, "You have to be all things to all people. You've got to be out in the community. You've got to be in the schools because if teachers, parents and schools don't see you they wonder if you're too isolated." "There's a visibility demand on you all the time. That causes stress although you make yourself available there's only so much of you to go around and you can't send representatives, it's the superintendent they're looking for. You're not really doing too much just making yourself visible, but it validates what they do."

Another superintendent noted, "Whether it's at the rotary club or in schools or visiting classrooms or at principals' meetings and all that, you have to be ready to engage interpersonally in a positive, kind of clear-eyed way all the time. I mean you can't fumble into a meeting and let somebody else carry the ball usually because even if it's not a meeting you're responsible for, people's heads quickly turn to you and you have to be ready to dance on a dime on almost every issue...and if you don't do that, then it appears I think to the people at the meeting as if you're not interested or not informed on the topic and that I think, causes a persistent on going certain level of stress." These remarks clearly underscore the major conclusions drawn here: That the position is becoming increasingly complex, that pressures come from diverse sources, and that the instructional leadership role of the superintendent has become obscure.

In recent years, as complexity has grown with the diverse demands placed on education, the purview of the superintendent has expanded into the area of fostering increased parental and community involvement. This increasing boundary spanning role engulfs their time, and contributes to stress. The present study found that Connecticut superintendents complained about the amount of time spent with community groups, the high visibility, the ongoing demand for high quality interpersonal communication, dealing with angry parents, managing crises, and the public criticism and demands. All this takes a high toll on their personal and professional lives.

Noting that the role of superintendents is shifting from one of directing and controlling to that of guiding, facilitating, and coordinating, Carter and Cunningham (1997), also pointed out the difficulty of the role given the current context of intense public pressure and criticism. The present study of Connecticut superintendents clearly

shows that Connecticut superintendents are indeed feeling the stress of public pressure and criticism. Superintendents bemoaned the time taken away from their educational leadership by political leadership activities. This study indicates that the political aspects of the position detract from educational leadership in that they are stressful, and take up considerable amounts of superintendents' time. If educational excellence is to be attained, superintendents must make student achievement their major focus. However, with politics and other matters causing stress and consuming an inordinate amount of their time, superintendents need support in maintaining the focus on student achievement.

Several studies point out the pivotal role played by the superintendent in the success or failure of public schools (Bridges, 1982; Cuban 1984; Glass,1992; IEL, 1986). A superintendent is expected to display excellence as an educational leader, to be politically sophisticated, to be aware of and active in legislative developments, to have an extensive knowledge of federal and state laws, to be an exemplary educator, and to personify effective communication (AASA & NSBA, 1994. p. 6).

Based on the literature on the superintendency and results of this study, the primary recommendation made here which holds policy implications is the need to reexamine the position of school superintendent, paying particular attention to the boundary spanning role.

In conclusion, if, as the AASA (1993) pointed out that the quality of America's schools, to a great extent, depends on the effectiveness of the school superintendent, and as Glass (1992) noted when leaders are under extreme stress, and organizations such as school districts, in which leaders constantly are under substantial pressure, generally do not perform well when they are more preoccupied with handling stress than with

developing the organization's potential, it is, then, imperative that measures be taken to help superintendents cope more effectively with the stressors inherent in their position.

While the boundary spanning role is essential to collecting the necessary information to influence strategic policymaking and planning, the superintendent's position is fraught with contradictions which certainly, as the pressures continue to increase, require a reconceptualization of the role. If public schools are to meet the challenges of the 21st century, it would be worth the while to reexamine all aspects of the position.

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